

Replacement Teeth Choices are Getting Better

New Technologies Improve Comfort and Appearance

While tooth loss among adults is far less common than it was just a few decades ago, replacing missing or damaged teeth is no less important. People value the health benefits and aesthetics behind a nice smile, and improvements to dentures and implant technologies offer people better replacement options.

“There are many good tooth replacement options for people to choose from,” said Max Anderson, D.D.S., a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association. “Cost, comfort, and appearance usually top the list of considerations; and the choices available today offer something for almost everyone.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one-quarter of the adults over 60 years of age have lost all of their teeth. Another government report notes the number of people without natural teeth is down 46 percent from 20 years ago.

Tooth loss can result from tooth decay, gum disease, or injuries. Whatever the cause, the consequences of missing teeth can affect quality of life issues, such as how we speak and interact with others. Tooth loss may contribute to nutrition problems by limiting the types of food we can eat. It can also impact adjacent teeth, worsening the overall effects of tooth loss.

Dentures have been the traditional replacement for teeth. Made from plastic, ceramic, metal, or a combination of materials, dentures are complete or partial removable replacements for missing teeth. Improvements in the methods used to size and fit dentures, as well as in the materials used to construct the replacement teeth, enable oral health practitioners to provide patients with natural-looking and comfortable dentures.



Dental implants are also a popular option to replace missing teeth. Implants are metal posts or frames that are surgically placed beneath the patients' gums. Over time, the implants fuse to jawbones, acting as artificial roots. Oral health professionals then mount dentures, bridges, or individual teeth to the implants.

Advantages offered by implants include that they don't need to be taken out at night, and they don't slip or shift when speaking and eating. Implants can also be used to improve the retention and stability of removable dentures. Unfortunately, not all patients are good candidates for dental implants due to the shape or amount of bone available to place the implant. Implants are also more costly than removable dentures and may not be covered by some dental benefit plans.

Whether patients choose removable dentures or dental implants, good oral hygiene and regular visits to the dental office remain important.

“People needing to replace missing or damaged teeth should begin the process by talking to their dentists. The dentists' knowledge of their patients' teeth and a discussion of their personal circumstances can help them plan the best solutions,” Dr. Anderson said.

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